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## COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

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Pastor Herrera, Jr.  
Director

October 25, 2006

To: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich  
Supervisor Gloria Molina  
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor Don Knabe

From: Pastor Herrera, Jr.  
Director, Department of Consumer Affairs



### **Comments on California Public Utilities Commission Order Instituting Rulemaking to Implement the Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006**

As a result of the passage of AB 2987, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has issued an Order Instituting Rulemaking to establish procedures to implement the Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006.

Consistent with the County's position of Oppose Unless Amended on AB 2987, Consumer Affairs is submitting comments to the CPUC regarding provisions of the Order Instituting Rulemaking. The attached comments are being submitted on behalf of the County through our outside counsel, the law firm of Miller & Van Eaton, LLP.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this process, please contact me at 213-974-9750, [pherrera@dca.lacounty.gov](mailto:pherrera@dca.lacounty.gov), or Fern Taylor, Chief, Telecommunications Franchising at 213-974-2711, [ftaylor@dca.lacounty.gov](mailto:ftaylor@dca.lacounty.gov).

Enclosure: Opening Comments: Rulemaking 06-10-005

c: David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer  
Raymond G. Fortner Jr., County Counsel  
Daniel Wall, CAO

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**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Order Instituting Rulemaking to Consider the  
Adoption of a General Order and Procedures to  
Implement the Digital Infrastructure and Video  
Competition Act of 2006.

Rulemaking 06-10-005

**OPENING COMMENTS OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

William L. Lowery  
Miller & Van Eaton, LLP  
400 Montgomery St., Suite 501  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 477-3655 (phone)  
(415) 477-3652 (fax)  
[wlowery@millervaneaton.com](mailto:wlowery@millervaneaton.com)

Attorney for the County of Los Angeles,  
California

October 25, 2006

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Order Instituting Rulemaking to Consider the Adoption of a General Order and Procedures to Implement the Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006.

Rulemaking 06-10-005

**OPENING COMMENTS  
OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

In response to the invitation and request of the Public Utilities Commission, the County of Los Angeles respectfully submits the following opening comments to certain provisions of the Order Instituting Rulemaking to Consider the Adoption of a General Order and Procedures to Implement the Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006 (“OIR”), and the Proposed General Order Implementing the Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006 (“Proposed General Order”) attached as “Attachment B” to the OIR.

As a general comment, Section VI of the OIR sets forth an aggressive timeline for the Commission to reach a “final determination on the policies and procedures needed to implement this legislation.” OIR, page 27. The stated rationale for this short timeline – the need to “implement this legislation consistent with its January 1, 2007 effective date” – is not supported by legislation itself. In apparent recognition of the comprehensive nature of AB 2987 and the complexity of the issues that will need to be resolved in implementing it, the Legislature set a date of April 1, 2007, for the Commission to begin accepting applications for state franchises. Pub. Util. C. § 5840(g). The County urges the Commission to utilize the extended time the Legislature authorized, rather than to rush through a rulemaking of this magnitude in order to reach the apparently self-imposed January 2, 2007 deadline to start accepting applications.

## COMMENTS TO THE OIR

The County hereby comments on the following provisions of the OIR.

### **III. Preliminary Scoping Memo**

#### **A. Scope of Commission Authority Pertaining to Video Franchising**

The OIR states:

“Under AB 2987, local entities, not the Commission, have sole authority to regulate pursuant to many other statutory provisions, including . . . notably, federal and state customer service and protection standards (§ 5900).” OIR, page 6.

However, AB 2987 provides:

The Division of Ratepayer Advocates shall have authority to advocate on behalf of video customers regarding renewal of a state-issued franchise and enforcement of Sections 5890, 5900, and 5950. For this purpose, the division shall have access to any information in the possession of the commission subject to all applicable restrictions on disclosure of that information that are applicable to the commission. Pub. Util. C. 5900(k) (emphasis added).

Section 5900 addresses state and federal customer service and consumer protection standards and privacy standards.

Public Utilities Code Section 309.5 describes the role of the Division of Ratepayer Advocates (“DIR”) as “to represent and advocate on behalf of the interests of public utility customers and subscribers within the jurisdiction of the commission.” Neither the OIR nor the Proposed General Order refer to the DIR or its role in Commission proceedings. However, the Legislature’s granting of authority to the DIR for purposes of advocating, on behalf of video customers, on enforcement of customer service and protection standards appears to be in direct conflict with the Commission’s conclusion that the Commission has no authority. Indeed, if the Commission has no enforcement authority, it is not clear exactly where the DIR will exercise its advocacy role. The Commission should clarify what the consumer protection and customer

service role of the DIR is in relation to the authority reserved to local entities in AB 2987, and whether the Commission does in fact have enforcement authority in this area.

**B. General Order Establishing State Video Franchise Rules and Processes**

**2. Section III: When Applicants Can/Must Apply for a State Video Franchise**

The OIR states:

“[T]he Commission tentatively concludes that incumbent cable providers whose local franchises expire prior to January 2, 2008 shall have the option of renewing their local franchises or seeking a state franchise, and that *incumbent cable operators opting to seek a state franchise shall have their existing local franchises extended until January 2, 2008.*” OIR, page 9 (emphasis added).

This tentative conclusion erroneously: (1) presumes that the Commission, rather than local entities, has authority under the legislation to extend such local franchises; (2) makes the extension of such local franchises both automatic and mandatory; and (3) implies that only incumbent cable operators who decide to seek a state franchise are subject to such an extension. The tentative conclusion is inconsistent with the language and intent of AB 2987 on all three counts.

Section 5930(b) of AB 2987 provides, in relevant part:

“When an incumbent cable operator is providing service under an expired franchise or a franchise that expires before January 2, 2008, *the local entity may* extend that franchise on the same terms and conditions through January 2, 2008.” (emphasis added).

Thus, unlike the tentative conclusion of the OIR, the Legislature granted local entities, rather than the Commission, the authority to extend expired or expiring local franchises through January 2, 2008. Further, the Legislature utilized the permissive “may” rather than the mandatory “shall” in granting local entities such authority. The use of permissive language demonstrates that the Legislature intended to give local entities in this situation the *option* to

extend an expired or expiring franchise through January 2, 2008, rather than imposing an automatic and mandatory extension of expired or expiring local franchises across the state. Finally there is nothing in Section 5930(c), or anywhere else in the bill, which ties the authority of local entities to extend a local franchise that has expired, or will expire prior to January 2, 2008, to the intent of the affected incumbent cable operator to seek a state franchise. The PUC should not create such a limitation where none was intended by the Legislature.

Accordingly, the tentative conclusion should not be adopted by the Commission, and instead, should be amended in a manner which is consistent with the language of the legislation.

#### **D. Calculation and Submission of User Fees**

##### **1. Policy and Procedures for Assessing User Fees**

In discussing “user fees” to be paid to the Commission by state franchise holders to fund the Commission’s budget for regulating state video franchises, the OIR states:

“The Legislature stipulates that this fee shall be determined and imposes consistent with Section 542 of the federal Communications Act. Section 542 establishes the terms under which a cable operator may be required to pay a “franchise fee” as defined for the purposes of Section 542.” OIR, page 20.

It is important that the Commission’s rules acknowledge that the user fees paid to the Commission by state franchises are not a franchise fee within the meaning federal law, and in no way impact the obligation of state franchises to pay to local governments the full franchise fee imposed pursuant to Section 5860 of AB 2987.

The Federal Cable Act, defines franchise fee to include:

"any tax, fee, or assessment of any kind imposed by a franchising authority or other governmental entity on a cable operator or cable subscriber, or both, solely because of their status as such." 47 U.S.C. 542(g)(1).

The Cable Act excludes certain taxes, fees, or assessments from the definition, however.

Among these exclusions are:

"any tax, fee, or assessment of general applicability (including any such tax, fee, or assessment imposed on both utilities and cable operators or their services but not including a tax, fee, or assessment which is unduly discriminatory against cable operators or cable subscribers)." 47 U.S.C. 542(g)(2)(A).

There can be no question that the Legislature's clear intent was that the user fee is a fee of general applicability – a fee imposed on both utilities and video service operators. The Legislative Counsel's Digest is supportive:

"Existing law provides for the Public Utilities Commission Utilities Reimbursement Account. Existing law authorizes the commission to annually determine a fee to be paid by every public utility providing service directly to customers or subscribers and subject to the jurisdiction of the commission, except for a railroad commission." Legislative Counsel's Digest, AB 2987, ¶ 3.

The bill itself directs the PUC to establish the "Video Franchising Account" in the Commission's Utilities Reimbursement Account. Pub. Util. C. § 440(b). Thus, there should be no question that the user fee falls within the 47 U.S.C. Section 542(g)(2) exception to the Cable Act definition of "franchise fee." Although there does not appear to be anything in Proposed General Order that states otherwise, the language of the OIR raises the issue without expressly stating that the user fee is not a franchise fee within the meaning of the federal Cable Act and AB 2987. Thus, the County urges that the Commission clarify this point in the final General Order.

### **COMMENTS TO THE PROPOSED GENERAL ORDER**

The County hereby comments on the following provisions of the Proposed General Order:

#### **III. When Various Applicants Can/Must Apply for a State Video Franchise**

##### **A. The Commission's Role in Processing Applications**

The Proposed Order states:

"After January 1, 2008, the Commission shall be the sole franchising authority for new Video Service franchises in the State of California. Any person or

corporation who seeks to provide Video Service in the state and does not already have a video franchise shall apply for a State Video Franchise with the Commission.” Attachment B, Page 17.

This language is worded differently than in AB 2987, and the difference is substantial enough to create an ambiguity with respect to meaning of the legislation. Section 5840(c) provides that “[a]ny person who seeks to provide video service in this state *for which a franchise has not already been issued*, after January 1, 2008. (emphasis added). Thus, under the statutory language, a state franchise is *mandatory* only for persons who, as of January 1, 2008, have never obtained a franchise – a that term is defined in the bill – for the area that person seeks to serve. Conversely, the language used in the Proposed General Order (“does not *already have* a video franchise”) creates a needless ambiguity regarding the situation where an incumbent cable operator (or any other person, for that matter) is, as of January 1, 2008, operating under a franchise that has expired and has not yet been renewed. The Legislature did not choose to make a state franchise mandatory in that situation. To the contrary, the Legislature gave the incumbent cable operator the *option* to apply for a state franchise (Section 5840(o)(1)), and gave the local entity the option to require the incumbent cable operator to obtain a state franchise (Section 5930(c)). Accordingly, the language in the proposed order should be amended to more accurately track the language of the legislation.

## **C. Applicants with Existing Franchises**

### **2. Franchise Effective Date**

The Proposed Order states:

“Prior to January 2, 2008, an Incumbent Cable Operator with an expired or expiring franchise may choose to renew the local franchise or seek a State Video Franchise. If a State Video Franchise is sought, the local franchise shall be extended under its existing terms until the state franchise is effective.” Attachment B, page 8.



This language conflicts with the language and intent of AB 2987 in several aspects. Specifically, the language: (1) presumes that the Commission, rather than local entities, has authority under the legislation to extend expired or expiring local franchises; (2) makes the extension of an expired or expiring local franchises “automatic” upon application for a state franchise by an incumbent cable operator; and (3) implies that only those incumbent cable operators who “seek” a state video franchise may have their franchises extended. There is nothing in the language of the Legislation which supports such rules.

As discussed earlier, Section 5930(b) of AB 2987 provides, in relevant part:

“When an incumbent cable operator is providing service under an expired franchise or a franchise that expires before January 2, 2008, *the local entity may* extend that franchise on the same terms and conditions through January 2, 2008.” (emphasis added).

There is nothing in the language which gives the Commission the authority to grant such extensions, or to make such extensions automatic and mandatory upon application for a state franchise by an incumbent cable operator with an expired or expiring local franchise. Instead, the Legislature clearly granted local entities the authority to extend such franchises. Further, the use of the permissive “may” rather than the mandatory “shall” clearly demonstrates the Legislature’s intent to grant local entities the discretion to extend or not to extend such franchises. Finally there is nothing in Section 5930(c), or anywhere else in the bill, that limits the authority of local entities to extend an expired or expiring local franchise to situations where the incumbent cable operator seeks a state franchise. The language of AB 2987 grants the local entity the option to extend an expired or expiring local franchise regardless of whether the incumbent cable operator applies for a state franchise or not. This section of the Proposed General Order should be amended in a manner that is consistent with the language of AB 2987.

**VI. The State Video Franchise – Authorization to Offer Service, Obligations, Amendment, Renewal, Transfer, Voluntary Termination, and Miscellaneous Charges**

**D. Renewal of A State Video Franchise**

**3. Commission Review and Issuance of a State Video Franchise Renewal.**

The Proposed General Order states:

“The Commission shall not renew any State Video Franchise that is inconsistent with federal law and regulations.” Attachment B, page 20.

It is unclear exactly what the Commission means by this language. However, it does not appear that the language is consistent with the intent of the Legislature.

With regard to the relationship between renewal of a state franchise and federal law, AB 2987 provides that “[r]enewal of a state franchise shall be consistent with federal law and regulations.” Cal. Pub. Util. C. §5850(c). Under federal law, cable franchise renewals are governed by the renewal provisions of the federal Cable Act, codified at 47 U.S.C. Section 546. The Cable Act provides two separate procedures by which a renewal can be granted. 47 U.S.C. Section 546(a) through (g) sets forth a set of detailed procedures for an administrative renewal process generally known as the “formal renewal process.” A key component of this process is the opportunity for the public to participate in the renewal process. *See*, 47 U.S.C. § 546(a)(1)(the local franchising authority shall “commence a proceeding which affords the public in the franchise area appropriate notice and participation for the purpose of (A) identifying the future cable-related community needs and interests, and (B) reviewing the performance of the cable operator under the franchise during the then current franchise term.”).

47 U.S.C. Section 546(h) provides an alternative means of franchise renewal. Under this provision – commonly known as the “informal process” – the local franchising authority and the

cable operator generally reach a negotiated agreement on the terms and conditions of a franchise renewal. However even under the informal process, the public must be afforded “adequate notice and opportunity to comment” on the renewal. 47 U.S.C. § 546(h).

There is nothing in the Proposed General Order which establishes procedures that provide the public an opportunity to participate in the renewal process. The Proposed General Order provides that renewal applications “shall be submitted and evaluated by the Commission according to the same criteria and processes applicable to initial State Video Franchise Applications. In the OIR, the Commission states a tentative conclusion that “no person or entity may file a protest to a state video franchise application.” OIR, page 11. This conclusion is incorporated in Section IV.C of the Proposed General Order. Attachment B, page 14. Thus, in fact, rather than providing the public an opportunity to meaningfully participate in the renewal process, the Commission appears to be expressly excluding the public from any participation.

Any state franchise renewal process which does not, at a minimum, afford the public with adequate opportunity for participation and comment, will not be “consistent with federal law and regulation” and therefore, will not be consistent with the language or intent of AB 2987. Accordingly, the renewal provisions should be amended to, at a minimum, provide an opportunity for meaningful public participation in the process.

### **CONCLUSION**

The County remains concerned that the Commission has not set aside sufficient time for this rulemaking, and believes that the issues raised in these comments demonstrate the complexity of implementing such comprehensive legislation. Accordingly, the County urges the Commission to set a more realistic timeline which allows the Commission and all parties

involved sufficient time to ensure that the Commissions delegated role in administering the new state franchising scheme is accurately and fairly reflected in the final General Order.

The County appreciates the opportunity to participate in this important rulemaking process, and anticipates submitting additional comments where appropriate at each stage.

Respectfully submitted,

Miller & Van Eaton, LLP  
400 Montgomery St., Suite 501  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 477-3655 (phone)  
(415) 477-3652 (fax)

by: \_\_\_\_\_  
William L. Lowery  
Attorney for the County of Los Angeles

October 25, 2006

### **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I certify that I have served a true copy of the original attached OPENING COMMENTS OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA on all known parties of record in this proceeding or their attorneys of record.

Dated: October 25, 2006 at Washington, DC

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Willette A. Hill

**CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**  
**Service Lists**

**Proceeding: R0610005 - CPUC - CABLE TELEVIS**  
**Filer: CPUC - CABLE TELEVISION**  
**List Name: INITIALLIST**  
**Last changed: October 23, 2006**

**Appearance**

WILLIAM H. WEBER  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
CBeyond COMMUNICATIONS  
320 INTERSTATE NORTH PARKWAY  
ATLANTA, GA 30339

ESTHER NORTHRUP  
COX CALIFORNIA TELCOM, LLC  
5159 FEDERAL BLVD.  
SAN DIEGO, CA 92105

FASSIL FENIKILE  
AT&T CALIFORNIA  
525 MARKET STREET, ROOM 1925  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105

ENRIQUE GALLARDO  
LATINO ISSUES FORUM  
160 PINE STREET, SUITE 700  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111

JOSEPH S. FABER  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
LAW OFFICE OF JOSEPH S. FABER  
3527 MT. DIABLO BLVD., SUITE 287  
LAFAYETTE, CA 94549

GLENN SEMOW  
DIRECTOR STATE REGULATORY & LEGAL AFFAIR  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
CALIFORNIA CABLE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
360 22ND STREET, NO. 750  
OAKLAND, CA 94612

LESLA LEHTONEN  
VP LEGAL & REGULATORY AFFAIRS  
CALIFORNIA CABLE TELEVISION ASSOCIATION  
360 22ND STREET, NO. 750  
OAKLAND, CA 94612

MARK RUTLEDGE  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FELLOW

DAVID C. RODRIGUEZ  
STRATEGIC COUNSEL  
523 WEST SIXTH STREET, SUITE 1128  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90014

KIMBERLY M. KIRBY  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
MEDIASPORTSCOM P.C.  
3 PARK PLAZA, SUITE 1650  
IRVINE, CA 92614

SYREETA GIBBS  
AT&T CALIFORNIA  
525 MARKET STREET, 19TH FLOOR  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105

MARK P. SCHREIBER  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
COOPER, WHITE & COOPER, LLP  
201 CALIFORNIA STREET, 17TH FLOOR  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111

DOUGLAS GARRETT  
COX COMMUNICATIONS  
2200 POWELL STREET, STE. 1035  
EMERYVILLE, CA 94608

JEFFREY SINSHEIMER  
CALIFORNIA CABLE &  
360 22ND STREET, 750  
OAKLAND, CA 94612

MARIA POLITZER  
LEGAL DEPARTMENT ASSOCIATE  
CALIFORNIA CABLE TELEVISION ASSN  
360 22ND STREET, NO. 750  
OAKLAND, CA 94612

GREG R. GIERCZAK  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE GREENLINING INSTITUTE  
1918 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SECOND FLR.  
BERKELEY, CA 94704

SURE WEST TELEPHONE  
PO BOX 969  
200 VERNON STREET  
ROSEVILLE, CA 95678

**Information Only**

KEVIN SAVILLE  
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL  
FRONTIER COMMUNICATIONS  
2378 WILSHIRE BLVD.  
MOUND, MN 55364

ANN JOHNSON  
VERIZON  
HQE02F61  
600 HIDDEN RIDGE  
IRVING, TX 75038

ALOA STEVENS  
DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT&EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
POLICY  
FRONTIER COMMUNICATIONS  
PO BOX 708970  
SANDY, UT 84070-8970

RICHARD CHABRAN  
CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY  
  
1000 ALAMEDA STREET, SUITE 240  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012

GREG FUENTES  
11041 SANTA MONICA BLVD., NO.629  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90025

JONATHAN L. KRAMER  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
KRAMER TELECOM LAW FIRM  
2001 S. BARRINGTON AVE., SUITE 306  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90025

MICHAEL J. FRIEDMAN  
VICE PRESIDENT  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT CORP.  
5757 WILSHIRE BLVD., SUITE 645  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90036

BARRY FRASER  
CABLE FRANCHISE ADMINISTRATOR  
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 208  
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

STEVEN LASTOMIRSKY  
DEPUTY CITY ATTORNEY  
CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
1200 THIRD AVENUE, 11TH FLOOR  
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

AARON C. HARP  
OFFICE OF THE CITY ATTORNEY  
CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH  
3300 NEWPORT BLVD  
NEWPORT BEACH, CA 92658-8915

BILL NUSBAUM  
THE UTILITY REFORM NETWORK  
711 VAN NESS AVENUE, SUITE 350  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102

CHRISTINE MAILLOUX  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
THE UTILITY REFORM NETWORK  
711 VAN NESS AVENUE, SUITE 350  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102

ELAINE M. DUNCAN  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
VERIZON  
711 VAN NESS AVENUE, SUITE 300  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102

REGINA COSTA  
THE UTILITY REFORM NETWORK  
711 VAN NESS AVENUE, SUITE 350  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102

WILLIAM K. SANDERS  
DEPUTY CITY ATTORNEY  
OFFICE OF THE CITY ATTORNEY  
1 DR. CARLTON B. GOODLETT PLACE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-4682

PETER A. CASCIATO  
A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION  
355 BRYANT STREET, SUITE 410  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

NOEL GIELEGHEM  
COOPER, WHITE & COOPER LLP  
201 CALIFORNIA ST. 17TH FLOOR  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111

GRANT KOLLING  
SENIOR ASSISTANT CITY ATTORNEY  
CITY OF PALO ALTO  
250 HAMILTON AVENUE, 8TH FLOOR  
PALO ALTO, CA 94301

MARK T. BOEHME  
ASSISTANT CITY ATTORNEY  
CITY OF CONCORD  
1950 PARKSIDE DRIVE  
CONCORD, CA 94510

CHRIS VAETH  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
THE GREENLINING INSTITUTE  
1918 UNIVERSITY AVE., 2ND FLOOR  
BERKELEY, CA 94704

BARRY F. MCCARTHY, ESQ.  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
MCCARTHY & BARRY LLP  
CALIFORNIA  
100 PARK CENTER PLAZA, SUITE 501  
SAN JOSE, CA 95113

JOE CHICOINE  
MANAGER, STATE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS  
FRONTIER COMMUNICATIONS  
PO BOX 340  
ELK GROVE, CA 95759

#### **State Service**

ANNE NEVILLE  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
CARRIER BRANCH  
ISSUES BRA  
AREA 3-E  
505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3214

MICHAEL OCHOA  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS & CONSUMER ISSUES BRA  
ROOM 4102  
505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3214

JOSE E. GUZMAN, JR.  
NOSSAMAN GUTHNER KNOX & ELLIOTT LLP  
50 CALIFORNIA STREET, 34TH FLOOR  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111-4799

ALEXIS K. WODTKE  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
CONSUMER FEDERATION OF CALIFORNIA (CFC)  
520 S. EL CAMINO REAL, STE. 340  
SAN MATEO, CA 94402

PETER DRAGOVICH  
ASSISTANT TO THE CITY MANAGER  
CITY OF CONCORD  
1950 PARKSIDE DRIVE, MS 01/A  
CONCORD, CA 94519

ROBERT GNAIZDA  
POLICY DIRECTOR/GENERAL COUNSEL  
THE GREENLINING INSTITUTE  
1918 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SECOND FLOOR  
BERKELEY, CA 94704

CHARLES BORN  
MANAGER, GOVERNMENT & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
FRONTIER COMMUNICATIONS OF  
9260 E. STOCKTON BLVD.  
ELK GROVE, CA 95624

SUE BUSKE  
THE BUSKE GROUP  
3001 J STREET, SUITE 201  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816

JOSEPH WANZALA  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS & CONSUMER  
ROOM 4101  
505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3214

ROBERT LEHMAN  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS & CONSUMER ISSUES BRA  
ROOM 4102  
505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3214



SINDY J. YUN  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
LEGAL DIVISION  
ROOM 4300  
505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3214

WILLIAM JOHNSTON  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS & CONSUMER ISSUES BRA  
ROOM 4101  
505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3214

TIMOTHY J. SULLIVAN  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
EXECUTIVE DIVISION  
ROOM 5204  
505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3214

DELANEY HUNTER  
CALIF PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
EXECUTIVE DIVISION  
770 L STREET, SUITE 1050  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814